

# Assessment in HE Conference

24th & 25th June  
2015



## Rethinking feedback for greater impact on learning

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# Overview

- Expectations
- Understanding feedback usefully
- Engaging students in feedback processes
- Designing feedback in

# Expectations

Who are you?

What bugs you about feedback?

# The problem

- No matter what we do about ‘feedback’, it is always found wanting and students are critical of us
- Is it just a matter of doing what we do now just with more vigor and more systematically?
- Is our use of the term feedback based on a misconception?

# Is this a helpful or unhelpful idea?

**Feedback** = information  
provided to students by  
tutors about students' work.

# Conventional 'feedback'

- Adjunct to 'marking'
- Undertaken by teachers on students
- Hope that it might be taken up
- But, no direct response is required or expected

***If we didn't use the conventional approach,  
how might good feedback be established?***

- Focus mainly on what learners do, not what teachers do
- Judge it in terms of 'does it make a difference', ie. on effects
- Examine key ideas about the origins of feedback
- Ensure feedback is self-improving
- Design feedback strategies as an intrinsic part of the course

# What does the activity of feedback do?

- It bridges the gap between teaching and learning, *ensuring the curriculum is adjusted* to the needs and learning of students
- It cannot be enacted without the engagement of participants—students and teachers.
- It only makes sense and it is necessarily stimulated by what students *actually do*.



# Generations of feedback

***Feedback Mark 0*** Conventional. Pre-feedback

***Feedback Mark 1*** Behavioural. Closed

***Feedback Mark 2*** Agentic. Open

# Analysing characteristics of feedback

- What are the features of different conceptions of feedback?
- How does each form operate?

# **Feedback Mark 1:**

Behavioural

Closed feedback

# Feedback Mark 1

- Idea of 'feedback' taken from control systems
- Information is taken from students' work and used to influence their subsequent work
- This later work is monitored to determine if the desired effects have been achieved
- Knowledge of effects is used to provide information to current students and for later cohorts

## Feedback Mark 1: A system of inputs and outputs

Information from the first activity is provided to students to influence their performance on the second activity and so on.



# Problems with Feedback Mark 1

- The teacher is the driver and needs to continually provide comments and monitor the situation
- The learner is dependent on the teacher to generate what they need to learn
- It is not *sustainable* assessment. It doesn't equip the student to learn beyond the immediate task or course

# What is sustainable feedback?

- That which doesn't continually need a teacher (or teaching system) to generate information
- Helps develop students' judgements of their work
- Develops learners' capacity to identify appropriate standards and criteria
- Develops learners' ability to locate and access useful sources of feedback
- Involves learners working with multiple others in giving and receiving feedback

# **Feedback Mark 2:**

Agentic

Open feedback



# Feedback Mark 2

- Taken from open adaptive systems
- Central role for learners. They are positioned as active
  - two-way interactions/dialogue between giver and receiver
  - use of peers, non-human sources and practitioners as well as teachers
  - others used to enable learners to calibrate their own judgements

# Feedback Mark 2

Feedback is a key element of the design of any curriculum

- a pedagogical practice integral to all learning processes
- deployed by *learners* as needed for their own learning paths
- located to enable:
  - sufficient practice to be had
  - feedback loops to be completed
  - effectiveness in self-judgement developed as a learning outcome

# What to consider in using Mark 2

- Discuss with students how feedback works and what it is for
- Position students as active feedback seekers
- View feedback as a dialogue about what is good work and how it can be achieved
- Respond to what *the student* needs
- As in all feedback, check on the effects of what students can do as a result

# The feedback-enabled curriculum

- Has early strategies to shift learner identity to becoming more self-regulated
- Positions feedback as part of learning, not as an adjunct of assessment
- Equips students to be skilled and comfortable with negotiating learning outcomes, feedback processes and information needs
- Fosters ongoing 'dialogue' between students and teachers about feedback processes, the nature of standards and the practicing of judgement.
- Introduces activities to enable students to calibrate judgement (of their own work and that of others)

# Clarifying: what is this saying?

- Comments about students' work are still vital
- But unless there is evidence of *effects* the person offering comments does not know what to say
- The opportunities for teachers to comment are far less than the need for feedback, so other mechanisms and people are needed
- Unless we can find more ways to actively mobilise students to help themselves, and each other, then courses will never be sufficiently tailored to meet their needs

# What we do can make a difference?

We can influence what students do with comments by

- Setting up the expectation that they will respond to and act on them (without action you aren't engaging in feedback at all)
- Pitching our comments in such a way that they will have a desirable effect on them
- Remembering that it isn't just our comments that will be influential
  - Include models/illustrations
  - Use others
  - Keep in mind what students want from you

# Hattie's model for feedback comments

- Comments can be directed at four different levels of operation of the student. Feedback will be ineffective if directed at an inappropriate level.
- The responses of students and their efficacy are dependent on the focus and type of comments they get.
- If the focus is inappropriate to their needs, feedback may be ineffective, because the student is unable to transform information into action where it is needed most.

Hattie and Timperley 2008; Hattie and Gan, 2011

# Levels of operation at which comments are pitched:

- Task focused
- Process focused
- Self-regulation focused
- Person focused



# Levels of operation at which comments are pitched:

- Task focused
  - Most common
- Process focused
  - More effective
- Self-regulation focused
  - Most needed
- Person focused
  - Mostly ineffective

# Elements of self regulation focus

- *capacity to create 'internal' feedback.*
- *ability to self-assess.*
- *willingness to invest effort into seeking and dealing with feedback information.*
- *degree of confidence or certainty in the correctness of the response.*
- *attributions about success or failure.*
- *level of proficiency at seeking help.*

# Guidance for those offering comments

- Be wary of old nostrums and supposed 'good practice'
- Involve the learner
  - if they are positioned as passive recipients they will act as such
- Think about what you really want to influence
  - It may not be good use of your time to offer simple corrections
- Always do it when student are in a position to act on it
  - Not at the end of a unit!
- Comment as if it were a part of an ongoing dialogue
  - One-off, disconnected input is very unlikely to influence

# Key points for excellent practice

## Design:

- are tasks positioned within the unit to enable feedback to occur and for students to improve their work?
- Are tasks (and what precedes them) designed to stimulate worthwhile learning?

## Inputs to students:

- Are comments to students designed to lead to specific improvements in their work?

## Responses of students:

- Are they expected from the start of the unit/task to be active players?
- Are they necessarily expected to respond to and act on inputs from others to produce improved work?

## Feedback to staff

- Are you monitoring students' work with a view to adjusting the unit/course to create bigger positive effects on their learning?

# Conclusions

- Let's change the language of feedback and focus on what makes a difference
- Design feedback loops into learning activities with opportunities for students to act on comments
- Position students as initiators of feedback at every opportunity

# Some useful websites on feedback

University of Edinburgh:

<http://www.tla.ed.ac.uk/feedback/index.html>

University of Strathclyde: Feedback is a dialogue

<http://www.strath.ac.uk/learnteach/feedback/>

Re-Engineering Assessment Practices in Scottish Higher Education

<http://www.reap.ac.uk/>

Assessment futures

<http://www.assessmentfutures.com>

University of Hong Kong: Exploring the Feedback Conundrum

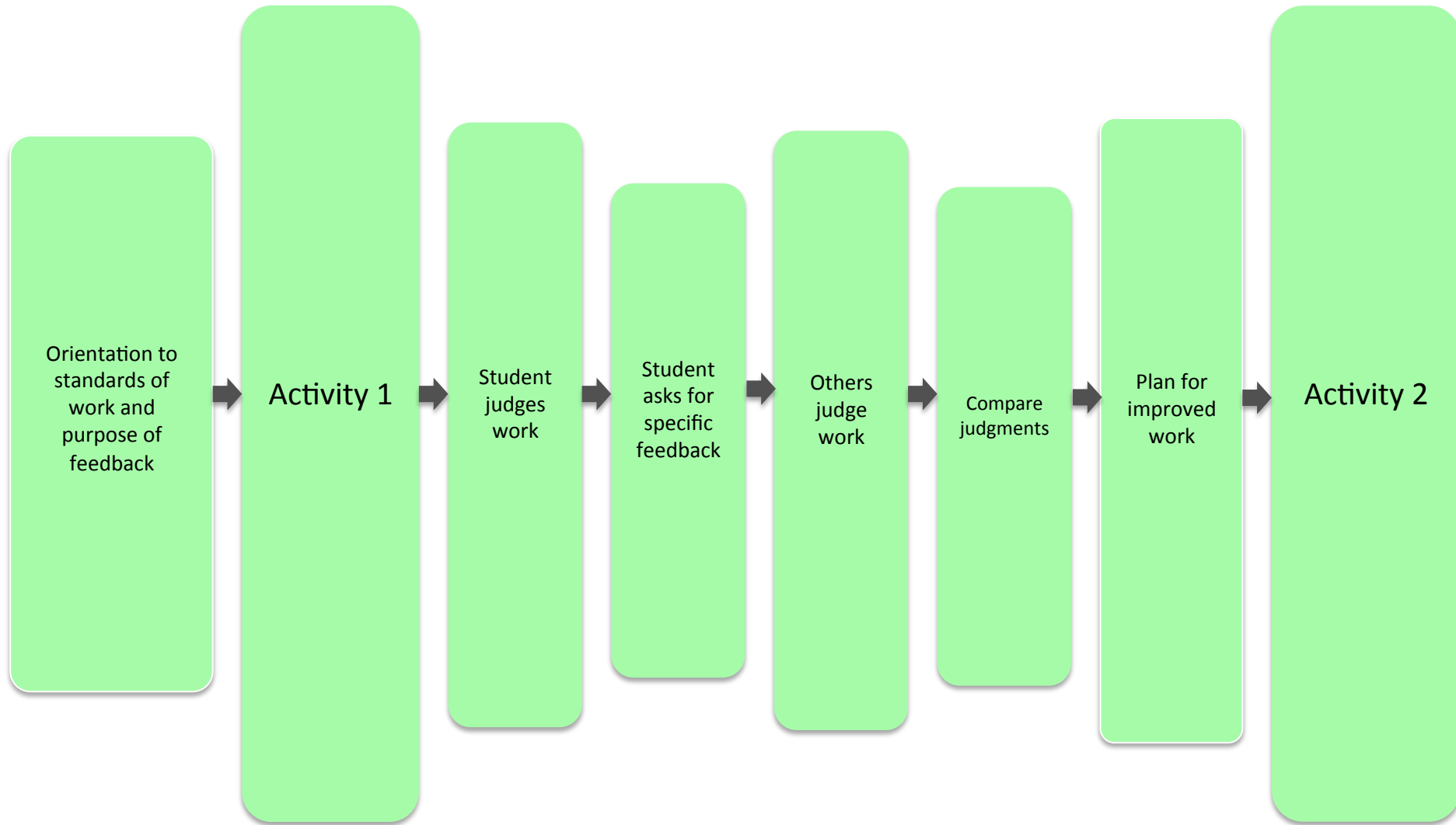
<http://hkufeedback.blogspot.com/>



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# Active role of students in eliciting, processing and using feedback





## Feedback as Iterative Task Design

Design of tasks to ensure overlap of some key learning outcomes. Nesting of tasks enables feedback loop to be completed through knowledge of the effects of earlier information provision in subsequent tasks.

